

WASHINGTON (23 Oct.) -- U.S. Rep. Gus M. Bilirakis (R-Fla.), member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, today called on congressional Democrats to complete the necessary work on a veterans and military construction spending measure.

More than one hundred and thirty days have passed since the House of Representatives approved by a nearly unanimous vote of 409-2, its version of the FY 2008 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act (H.R. 2642). The Senate passed its own version of the bill on Sept. 6, yet there remains inaction by Democrat congressional leadership to appoint their conferees needed to hash out differences between the two versions of the bill.

"I urge the Democrat majority to move forward with their selection of the conferees so that the differences in this bill can be worked out and brought before the House and Senate for final passage and presented to the President," said Bilirakis. "America's veterans deserve our prompt and full attention. It is beyond me why it has taken the Democrats so long to get their act together on what seems to be a simple matter of picking the folks they want to sit down with us to discuss the differences in the two versions of this bill."

For weeks, Congressman Bilirakis has been pressing Democrat House and Senate leaders for action on the veterans and military construction spending bill to no avail. On September 17, Bilirakis signed a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi urging her "in the strongest possible terms to reach a prompt agreement on the conference report."

In a similar letter on Oct. 4 to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Bilirakis joined his colleagues in imploring the Senate to also act. "It is unfortunate the Senate has been unable to act upon many of its constitutionally mandated appropriations bills," the letter said. "While the House continues to wait upon the Senate to complete its work, we call upon you to quickly move veterans appropriations through conference."

Increasing funding by \$6 billion, if accepted, H.R. 2642 would constitute the largest funding boost in the 77 year history of the Department of Veterans Affairs.